SPOTLIGHT

IDW

CVR A

BARBER

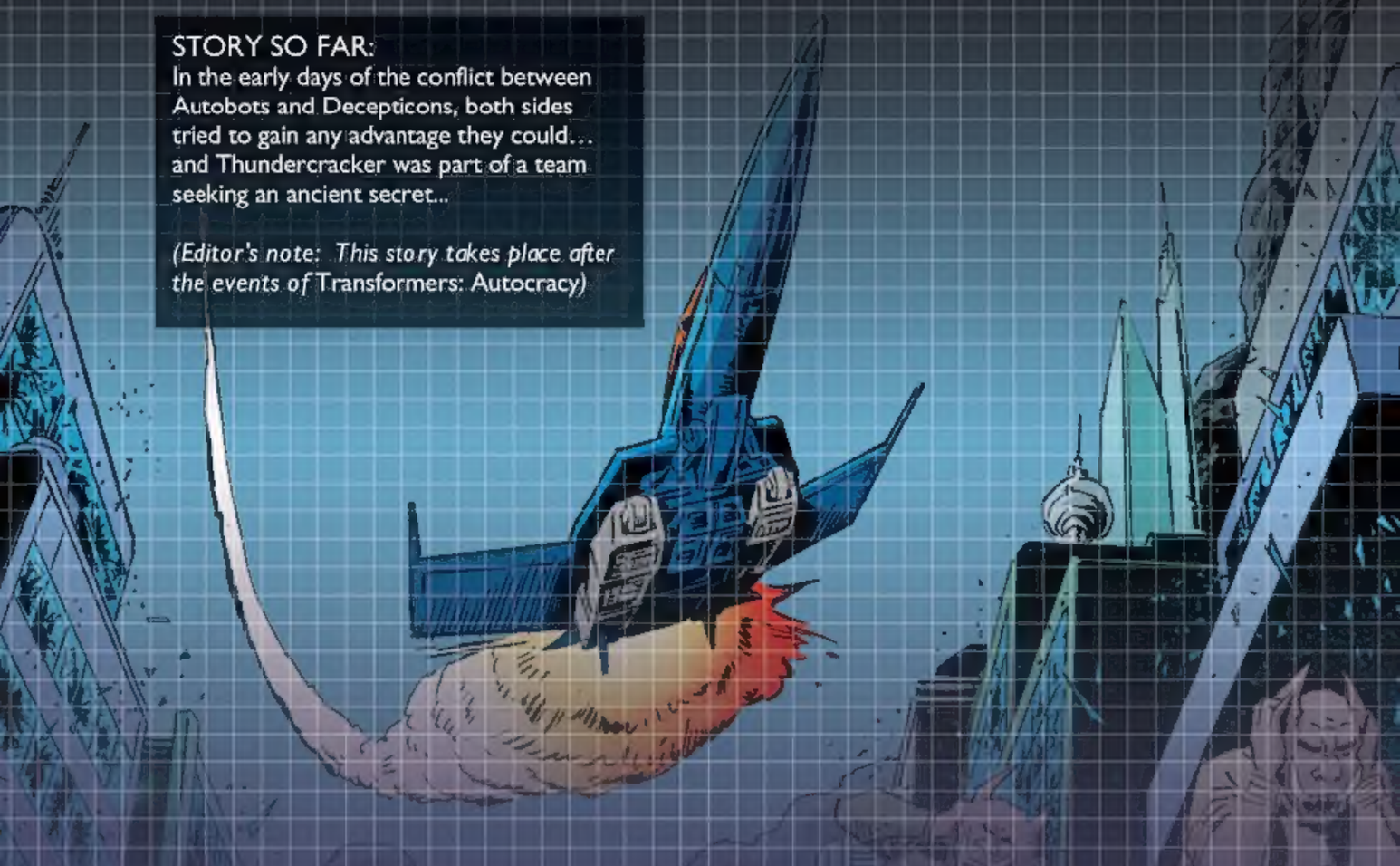
CHEE

THE TRANSFORMERS™

THUNDERCRACKER

SPOTLIGHT

THE TRANSFORMERS™



STORY SO FAR:
In the early days of the conflict between Autobots and Decepticons, both sides tried to gain any advantage they could... and Thundercracker was part of a team seeking an ancient secret...

(Editor's note: This story takes place after the events of Transformers: Autocracy*)*

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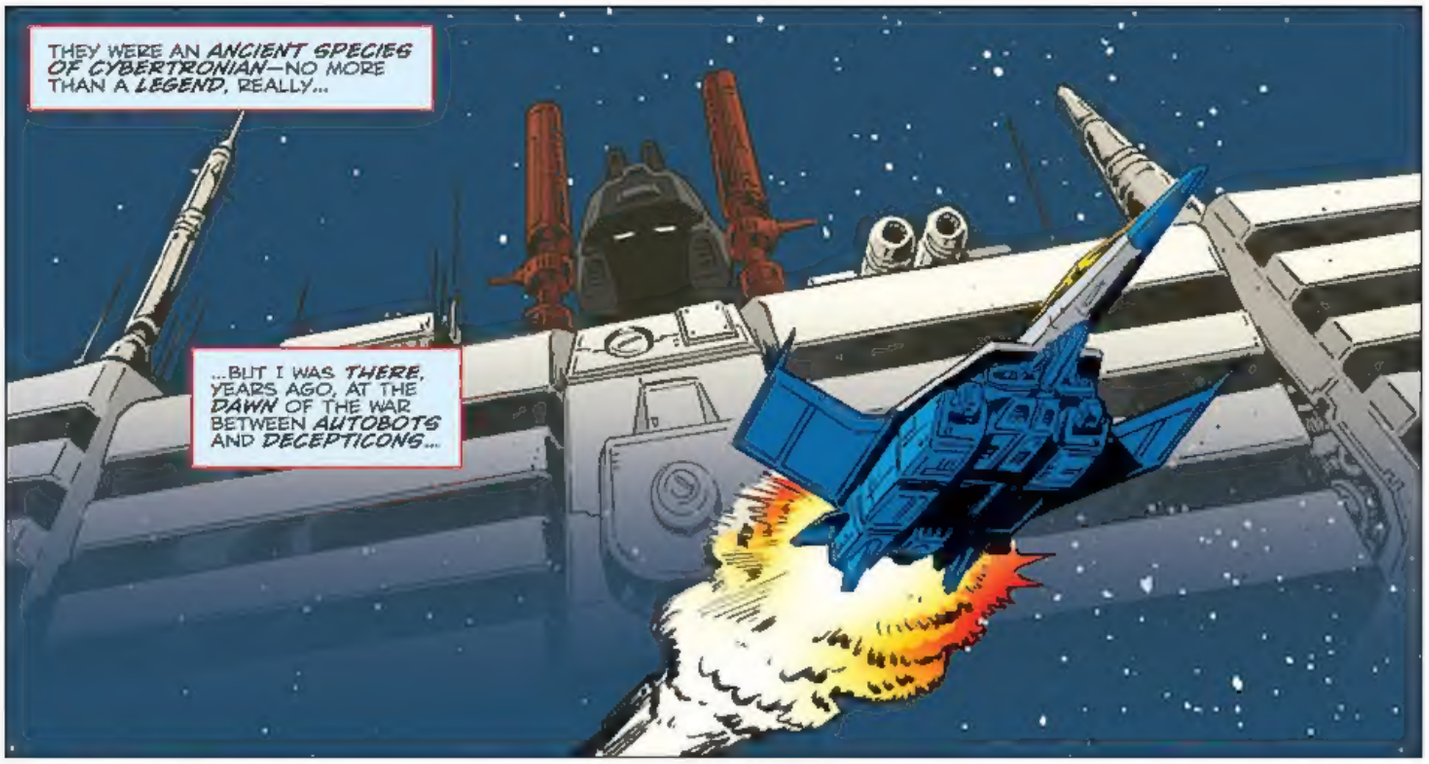
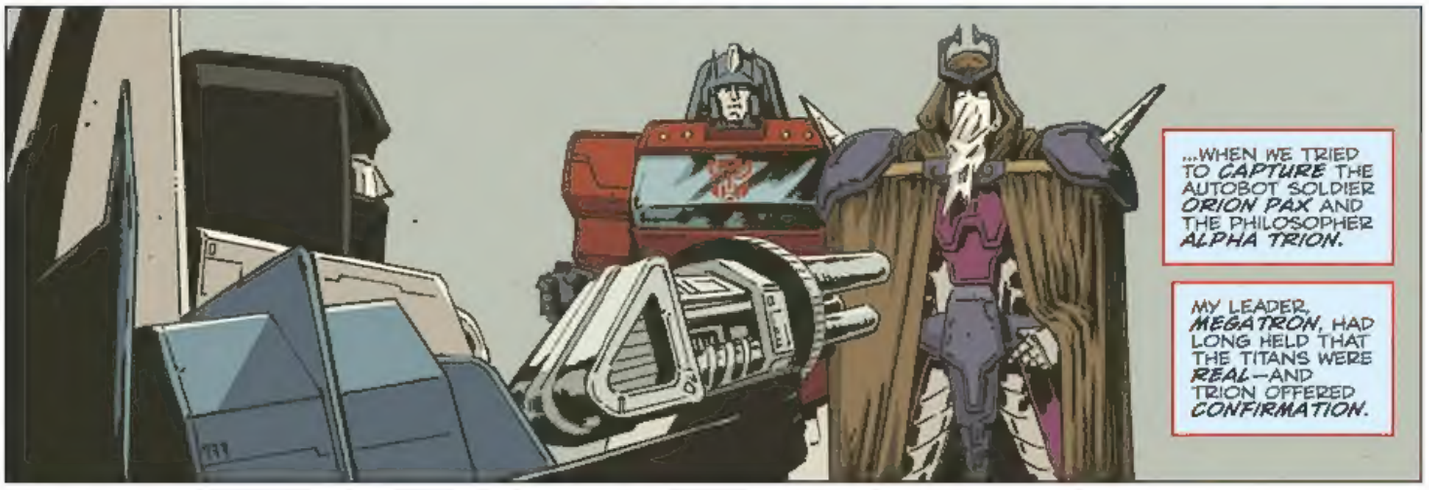
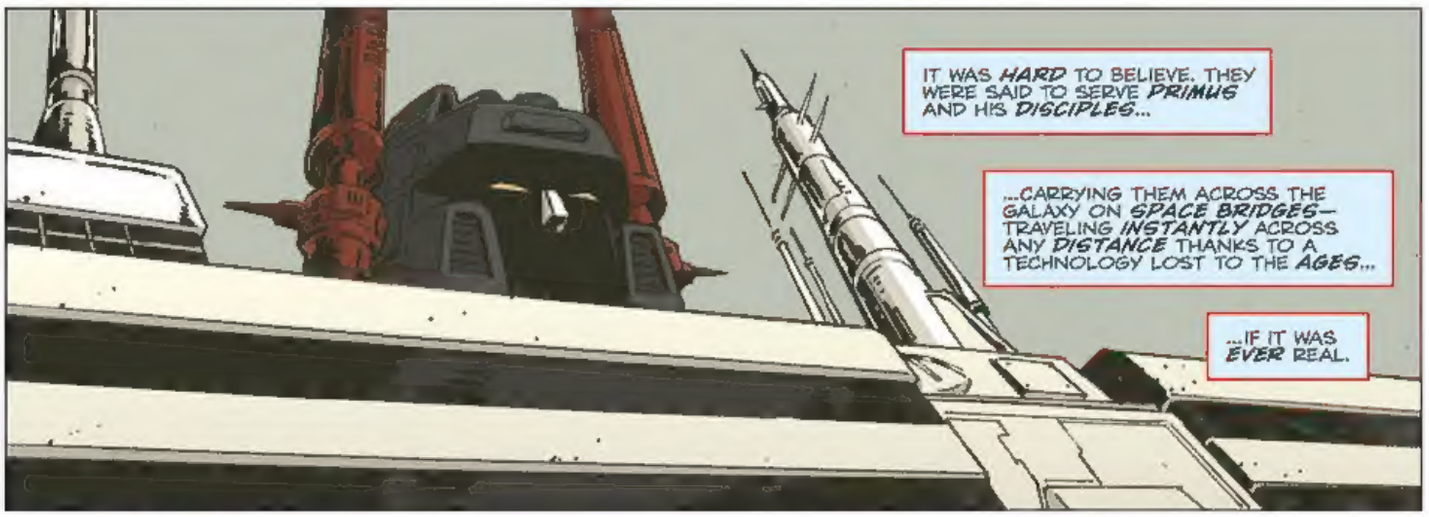
SPACE. LONG AGO.
ATMOSPHERE IS AT, AH... ABOUT POINT-SIX CYBERTRONIAN DENSITY...
...UNUSUALLY HEAVY FOR AN ASTEROID THIS SIZE.
THAT'S FASCINATING. REALLY. THIS IS EXACTLY WHY I JOINED THE DECEPTICONS...
...NO, WAIT. I SIGNED ON TO KILL AUTOBOTS—
—NOT CLIMB AROUND ROCKS IN SPACE.
I KNOW, BLITZWING. THIS ISN'T MY THING, EITHER...
...BUT I'M GETTING SOME WEIRD READINGS ON THE SCANNER.
TOO MUCH AIR, TOO MANY ALPHA PARTICLES...
TOO MUCH SCIENCE.
WHAK
AT LEAST ACT LIKE YOU'RE A SEEKER, THUNDERCRACKER.
THERE'S NOTHING TO FIND.
IF METROPLEX WAS EVER HERE, HE'S LONG GONE.
IT WAS THE TWO-HUNDRED-AND-THIRTY-EIGHTH DAY...

...AND WE HAD NOTHING TO SHOW FOR OUR HUNT.
NOTHING BUT A BROKEN DATAPAD, A WEIRD CHUNK OF METAL, A LACK OF RESPECT FROM MY COLLEAGUES...
...AND A DESTROYED OUTPOST OF SOME MISERABLE CIVILIZATION WE NEVER BOTHERED TO LEARN THE NAME OF.
WE ANNIHILATED IT ON THE WAY IN BECAUSE IT STOOD BETWEEN US AND OUR GOAL.
JUST A COSMIC WASTE OF RESOURCES, DOOMED BY UNFORTUNATE GEOGRAPHY.
IT DOESN'T MATTER— THE MISSION MATTERS.
ONLY THE HUNT MATTERS.
THE HUNTING PARTY

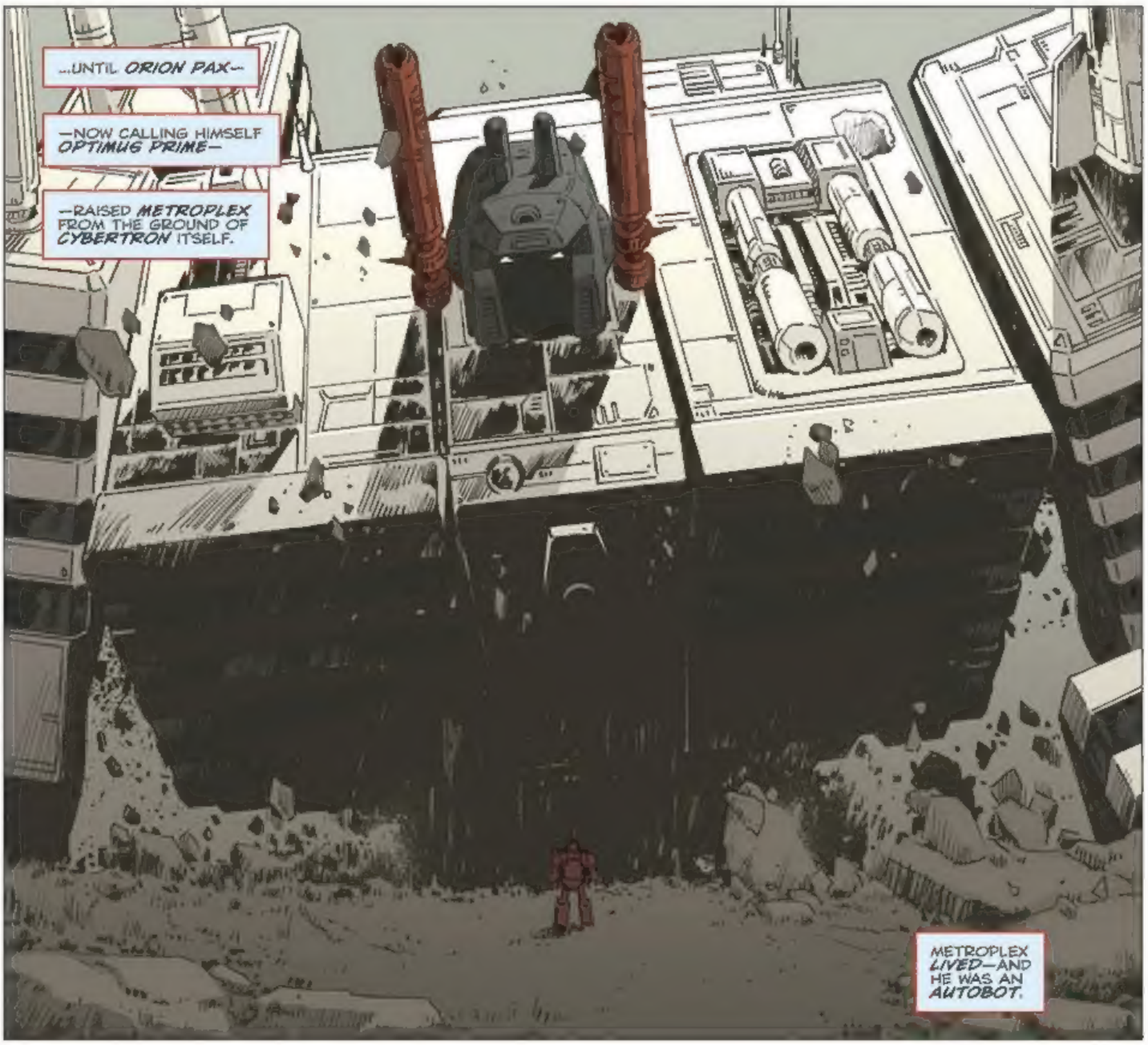
WE HUNT A TITAN...
...WE HUNT THE FIRST AND GREATEST OF THEM ALL.

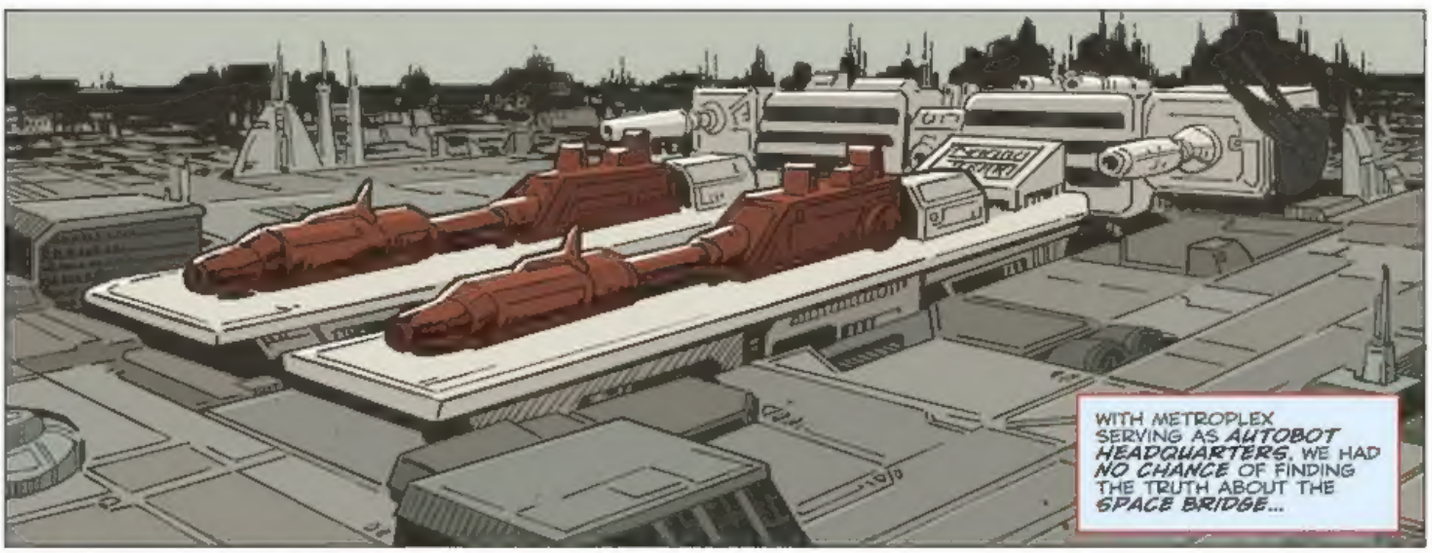

THEY WERE AN ANCIENT SPECIES OF CYBERTRONIAN—NO MORE THAN A LEGEND, REALLY...
...BUT I WAS THERE, YEARS AGO, AT THE DAWN OF THE WAR BETWEEN AUTOBOTS AND DECEPTICONS...

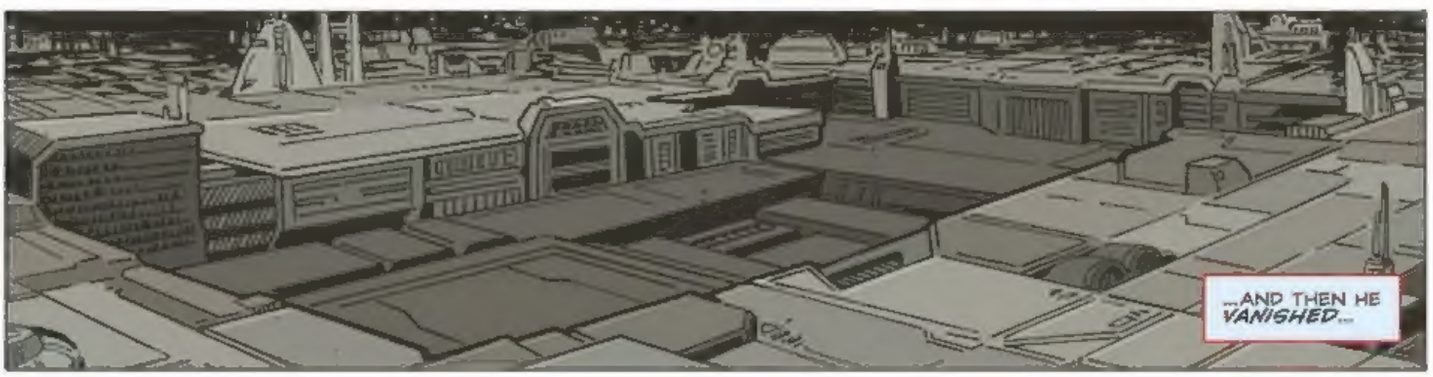

...WHEN WE TRIED TO CAPTURE THE AUTOBOT SOLDIER ORION PAX AND THE PHILOSOPHER ALPHA TRION.
MY LEADER, MEGATRON, HAD LONG HELD THAT THE TITANS WERE REAL—AND TRION OFFERED CONFIRMATION.


IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE. THEY WERE SAID TO SERVE PRIMUS AND HIS DISCIPLES...
...CARRYING THEM ACROSS THE GALAXY ON SPACE BRIDGES—TRAVELING INSTANTLY ACROSS ANY DISTANCE THANKS TO A TECHNOLOGY LOST TO THE AGES...
...IF IT WAS EVER REAL.

THE TITANS ALL VANISHED, EONS AGO. WE ASSUMED THEY'D GONE TO THE STARS...


...UNTIL ORION PAX—
—NOW CALLING HIMSELF OPTIMUS PRIME—
—RAISED METROPLEX FROM THE GROUND OF CYBERTRON ITSELF.
METROPLEX LIVED—AND HE WAS AN AUTOBOT.


WITH METROPLEX SERVING AS AUTOBOT HEADQUARTERS, WE HAD NO CHANCE OF FINDING THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SPACE BRIDGE...


...AND THEN HE VANISHED...

...AND I WOUND UP *HERE*—
—SEARCHING THE *GALAXY*, BECAUSE I *HAPPENED* TO BE THERE WHEN ALPHA TRION HAPPENED TO SAY SOMETHING.

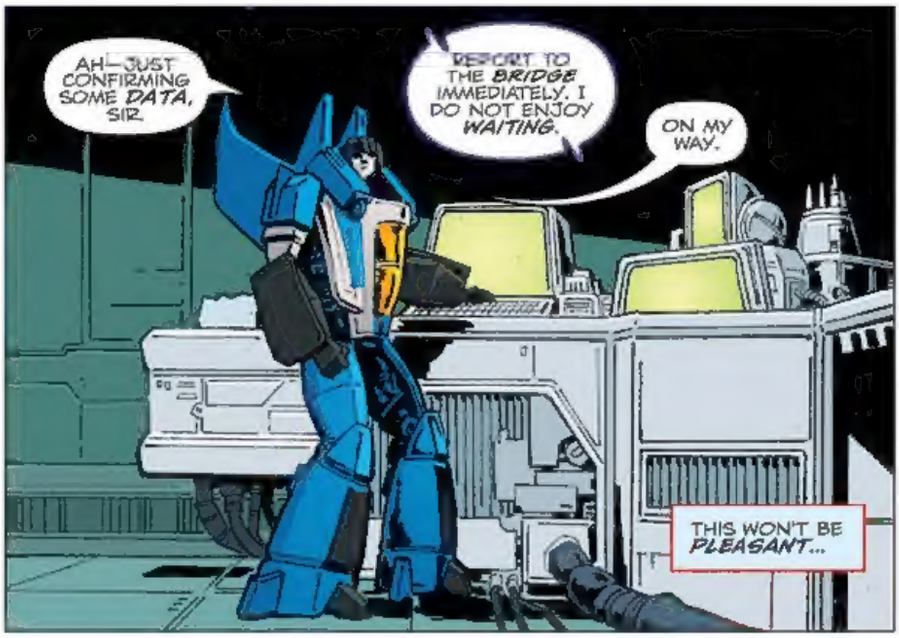
NOT TO SOUND *BITTER*, BUT WHEN NOBODY BUT ME SAW THAT PIECE OF *METAL* ON THE GROUND NEXT TO MY DATAPAD...
...WELL, I MADE *SURE* NOBODY SAW ME *PICK* IT *UP*. IT WAS CYBERTRONIAN—I COULD TELL *THAT*.
THE *REST* WAS JUST A *HUNCH* AND A *HOPE*. WHAT IF THIS WAS SOMETHING *METROPLEX* LEFT BEHIND...

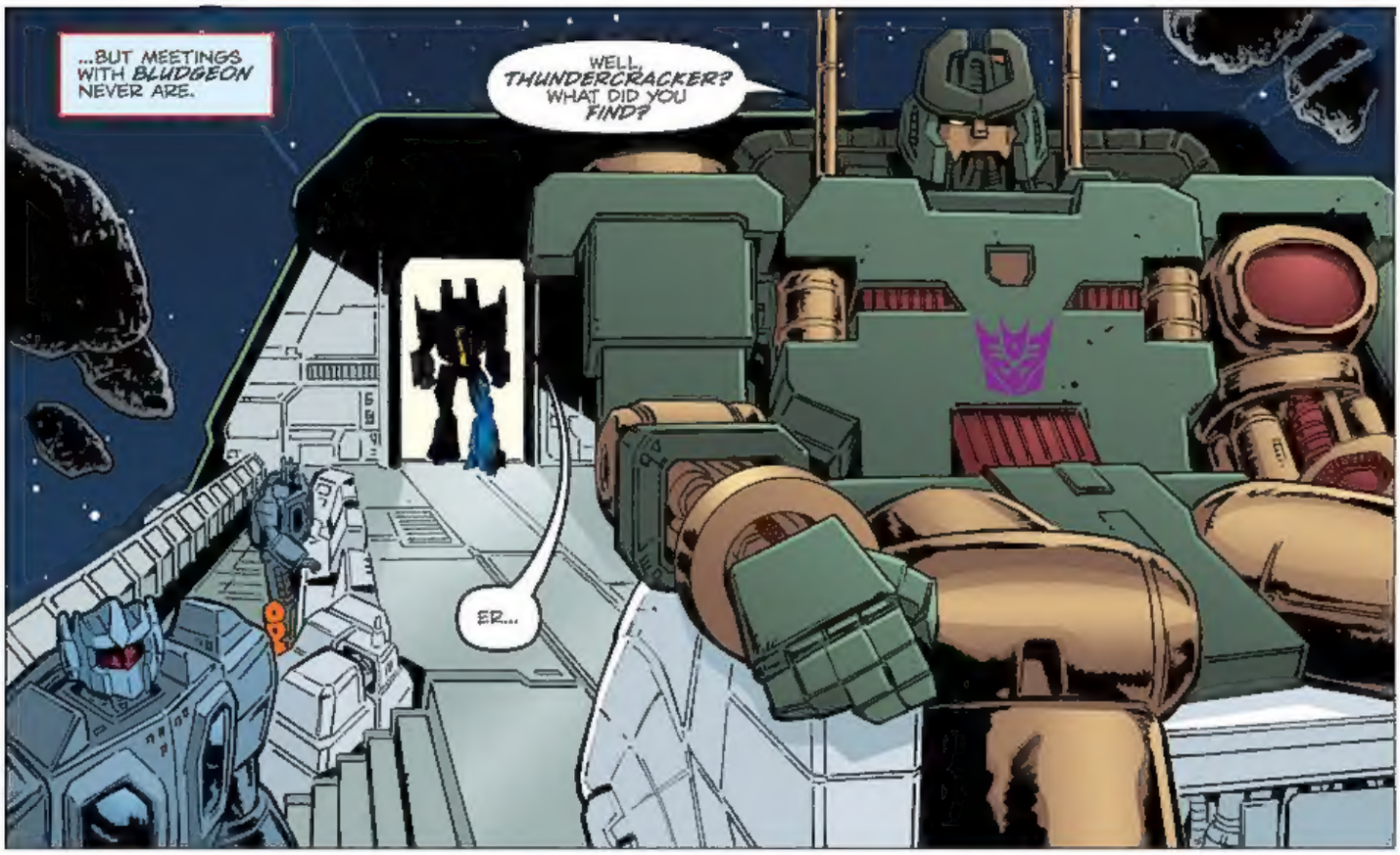
...AND WHAT IF IT GAVE US SOME KIND OF A *TRAIL* TO FOLLOW...?
COMPUTER—RUN A FULL-SPECTRUM *RESONANCE SCAN*.
DETECTED.
UM. ANYTHING *UNUSUAL*?

OBJECT IS EXTREMELY OLD.
NO HELP.
QUANTUM-TUNNELING RADIATION IS EMANATING AT A RARE WAVELENGTH.
THERE—*THAT*. SEARCH THIS SECTOR FOR *SIMILAR RADIATION*.

DETECTED.
A *SMALL PLANETOID*, LIKE THE ONE WE'RE ORBITING:
LITTLE TO NO LIFE AND AN UNUSUALLY *DENSE* ATMOSPHERE, GIVEN ITS *GRAVITATIONAL SIGNATURE*.

ONLY A FEW *QUANTUM JUMPS* AWAY...
THUNDERCRACKER. WHERE *ARE* YOU?


AH—JUST CONFIRMING SOME *DATA*, SIR.
REPORT TO THE *BRIDGE* IMMEDIATELY. I DO NOT ENJOY *WAITING*.
ON MY WAY.
THIS WON'T BE *PLEASANT*...


...BUT MEETINGS WITH *BLUDGEON* NEVER ARE.
WELL, *THUNDERCRACKER?* WHAT DID YOU *FIND?*
ER...

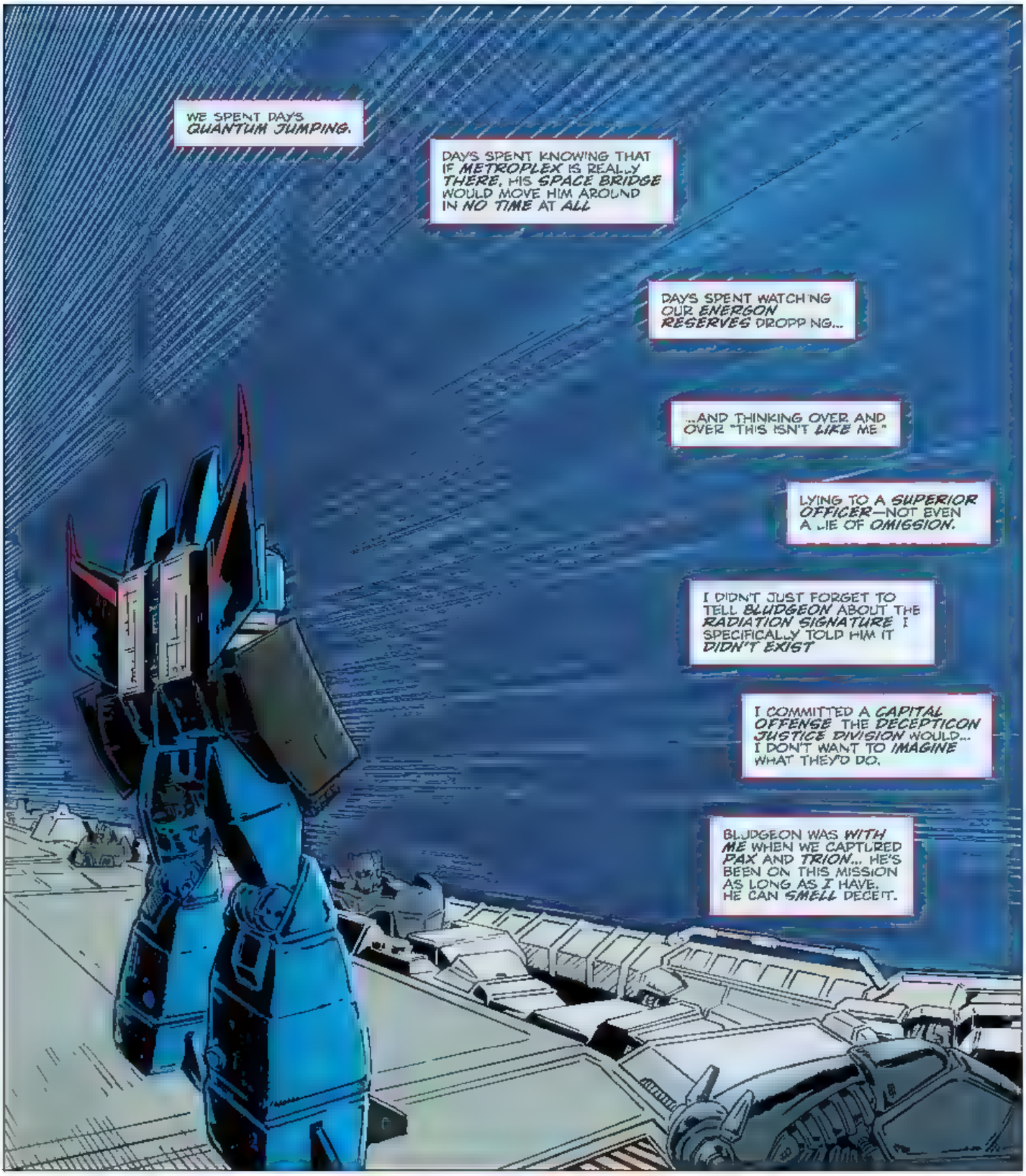
...WELL, SIR. EVIDENCE SUGGESTS METROPLEX *HAD* BEEN THERE, AN *INDETERMINATE* TIME AGO.

ANYTHING THAT MIGHT *LEAD US* TO HIM?

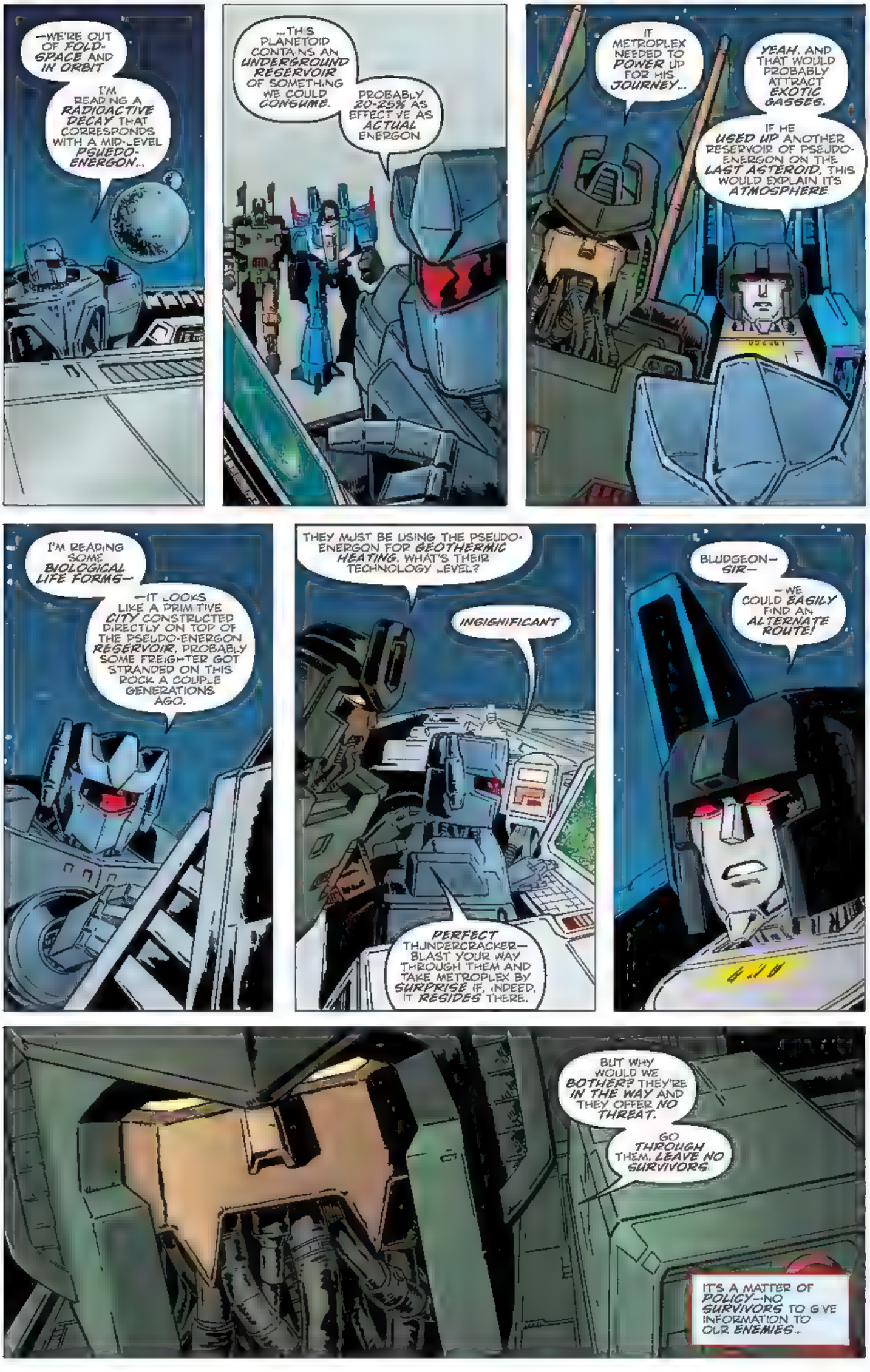
N-NO, SIR. *NOTHING.*
BUT I DO HAVE A *HUNCH*— A STAR SYSTEM WITH *SIMILAR CHARACTERISTICS.*

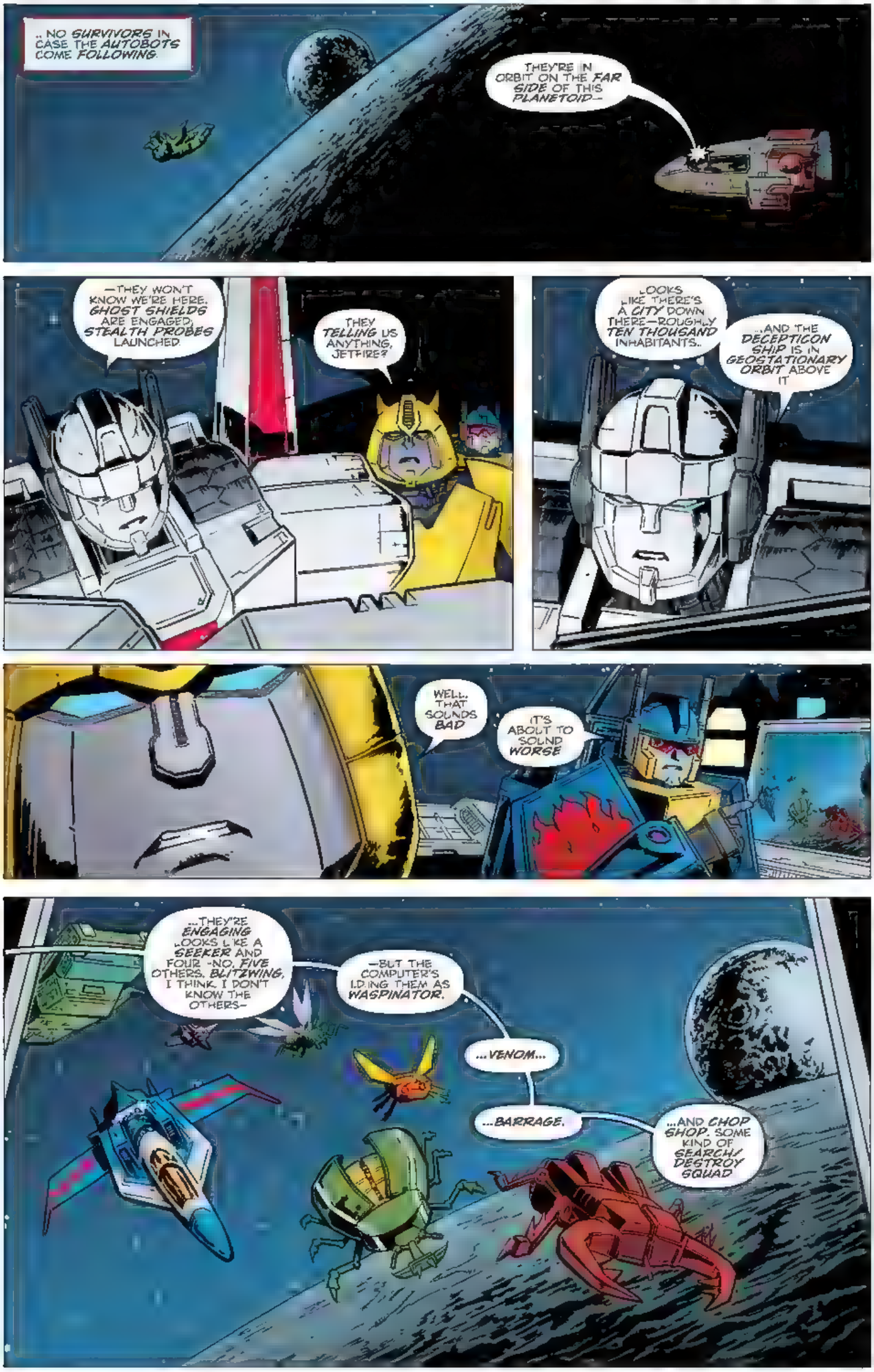
A HUNCH.
I *LIKE* THAT. NAVIGATOR—*SET COURSE* TO THUNDERCRACKER'S HUNCH.
WHY DID I LIE? WHY DID I *HOLD* BACK INFORMATION...?

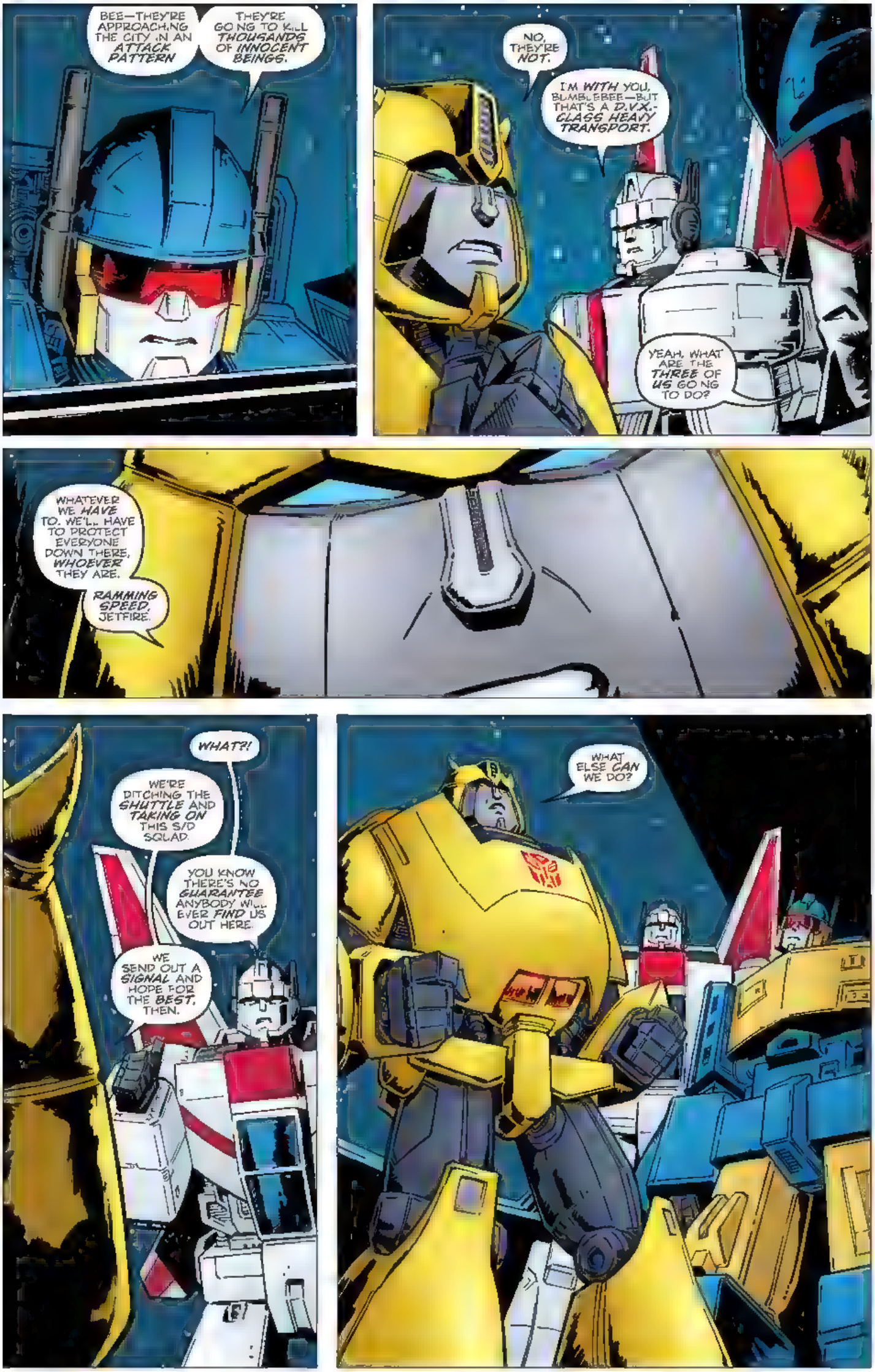
...I WISH I KNEW.
I WISH I KNEW WHAT THOSE DECEPTICONS WERE UP TO.
I WISH I KNEW WHAT NIGHTBEAT AND I ARE DOING HERE. WE'RE NOT FLIERS OR SCIENTISTS LIKE YOU, JETFIRE.
PRIME TRUSTS YOU, SO YOU'RE HERE.
I CHECKED THEIR SIGNAL PROTOCOLS. IT'S THE EMPIRION.
BLUDGEON'S SHIP.
YOU'VE BEEN STUDYING, BUMBLEBEE.
THAT'S A BIG CATCH. TOO BIG FOR THE THREE OF US.
THEY PROBABLY HAVE A WHOLE CADRE OF SHOCK TROOPS.
ENOUGH TO DESTROY THAT NIBARIAN OUTPOST, ANYWAY.
THEY'RE INITIATING A QUANTUM JUMP.
FOLLOW THEM.
BEE, YOU JUST SAID WE NEED REINFORCEMENTS—
AND WE DON'T HAVE ANY. WE'RE TOO FAR OUT; NOBODY COULD BE HERE FOR DAYS.
SO—
SETTING COURSE, BEE. I WAS GETTING BORED WITH NOT GETTING SHOT AT, ANYWAY.


WE SPENT DAYS QUANTUM JUMPING.
DAYS SPENT KNOWING THAT IF METROPLEX IS REALLY THERE, HIS SPACE BRIDGE WOULD MOVE HIM AROUND IN NO TIME AT ALL
DAYS SPENT WATCHING OUR ENERGON RESERVES DROPPING...
...AND THINKING OVER AND OVER "THIS ISN'T LIKE ME."
LYING TO A SUPERIOR OFFICER—NOT EVEN A LIE OF OMISSION.
I DIDN'T JUST FORGET TO TELL BLUDGEON ABOUT THE RADIATION SIGNATURE I SPECIFICALLY TOLD HIM IT DIDN'T EXIST
I COMMITTED A CAPITAL OFFENSE THE DECEPTICON JUSTICE DIVISION WOULD... I DON'T WANT TO IMAGINE WHAT THEY'D DO.
BLUDGEON WAS WITH ME WHEN WE CAPTURED PAX AND TRION... HE'S BEEN ON THIS MISSION AS LONG AS I HAVE. HE CAN SMELL DECEIT.

ANYWAY... I'M A DECEPTICON SEEKER. THAT IS MY IDENTITY.
WHAT DO I HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH BY ACTING LIKE SOMETHING ELSE?
FINAL JUMP SUCCESSFUL—


—WE'RE OUT OF FOLD-SPACE AND IN ORBIT
I'M READING A RADIOACTIVE DECAY THAT CORRESPONDS WITH A MID-LEVEL PSUEDO-ENERGON...
...THIS PLANETOID CONTAINS AN UNDERGROUND RESERVOIR OF SOMETHING WE COULD CONSUME.
PROBABLY 20-25% AS EFFECTIVE AS ACTUAL ENERGON.
IF METROPLEX NEEDED TO POWER UP FOR HIS JOURNEY...
YEAH. AND THAT WOULD PROBABLY ATTRACT EXOTIC GASSES.
IF HE USED UP ANOTHER RESERVOIR OF PSEUDO-ENERGON ON THE LAST ASTEROID, THIS WOULD EXPLAIN ITS ATMOSPHERE.
I'M READING SOME BIOLOGICAL LIFE FORMS—
—IT LOOKS LIKE A PRIMITIVE CITY CONSTRUCTED DIRECTLY ON TOP OF THE PSEUDO-ENERGON RESERVOIR, PROBABLY SOME FREIGHTER GOT STRANDED ON THIS ROCK A COUPLE GENERATIONS AGO.
THEY MUST BE USING THE PSEUDO-ENERGON FOR GEOTHERMIC HEATING. WHAT'S THEIR TECHNOLOGY LEVEL?
INSIGNIFICANT
PERFECT THUNDERCRACKER—BLAST YOUR WAY THROUGH THEM AND TAKE METROPLEX BY SURPRISE IF, INDEED, IT RESIDES THERE.
BLUDGEON—SIR—
—WE COULD EASILY FIND AN ALTERNATE ROUTE!
BUT WHY WOULD WE BOTHER? THEY'RE IN THE WAY AND THEY OFFER NO THREAT.
GO THROUGH THEM. LEAVE NO SURVIVORS.
IT'S A MATTER OF POLICY—NO SURVIVORS TO GIVE INFORMATION TO OUR ENEMIES..

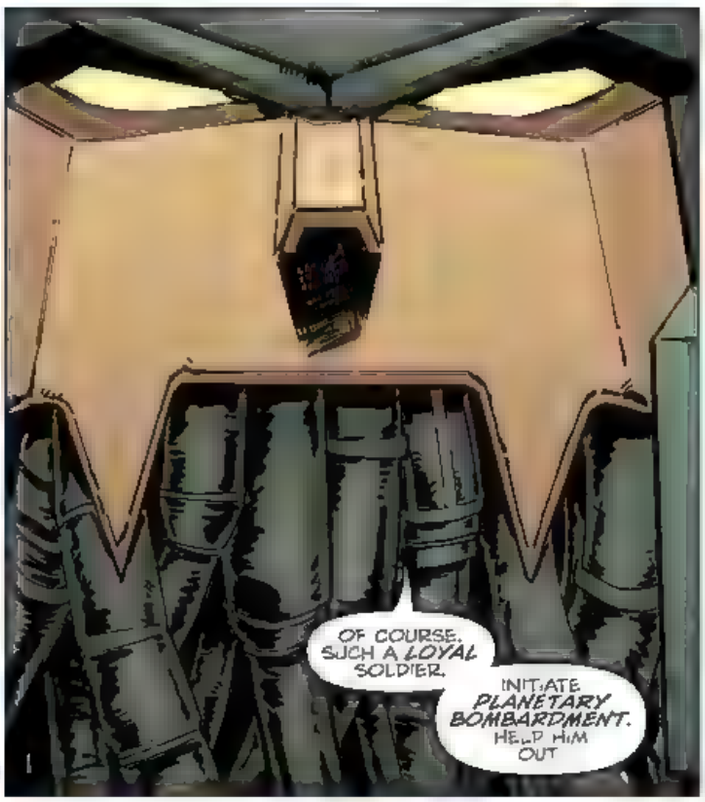

..NO SURVIVORS IN CASE THE AUTOBOTS COME FOLLOWING.
THEY'RE IN ORBIT ON THE FAR SIDE OF THIS PLANETOID—
—THEY WON'T KNOW WE'RE HERE. GHOST SHIELDS ARE ENGAGED, STEALTH PROBES LAUNCHED.
THEY TELLING US ANYTHING, JETFIRE?
LOOKS LIKE THERE'S A CITY DOWN THERE—ROUGHLY TEN THOUSAND INHABITANTS..
...AND THE DECEPTICON SHIP IS IN GEOSTATIONARY ORBIT ABOVE IT
WELL, THAT SOUNDS BAD
IT'S ABOUT TO SOUND WORSE
...THEY'RE ENGAGING LOOKS LIKE A SEEKER AND FOUR -NO, FIVE OTHERS. BLITZWING, I THINK. I DON'T KNOW THE OTHERS—
—BUT THE COMPUTER'S I.D.ING THEM AS WASPINATOR.
...VENOM...
...BARRAGE.
...AND CHOP SHOP. SOME KIND OF SEARCH/DESTROY SQUAD

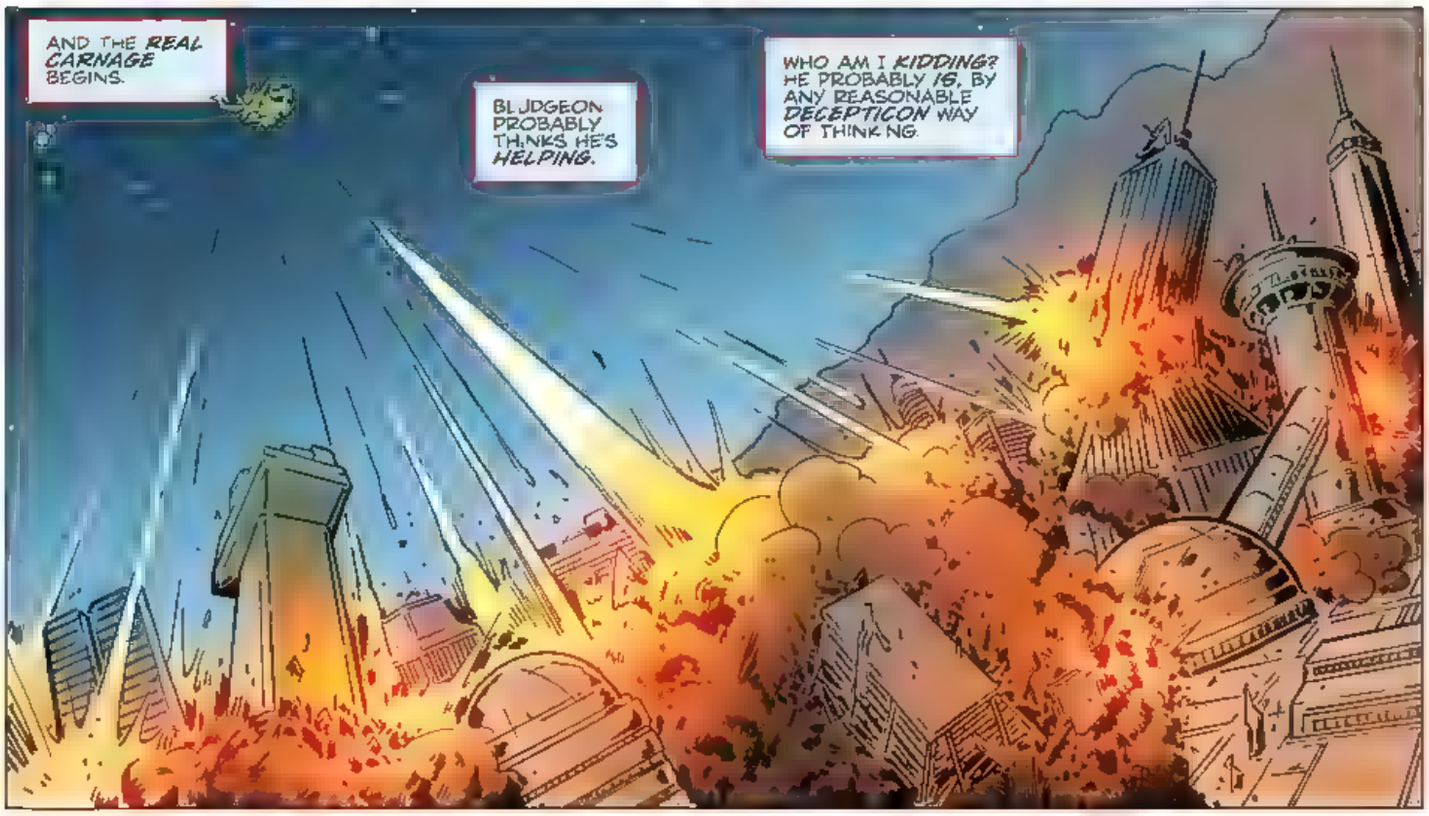

BEE—THEY'RE APPROACHING THE CITY IN AN ATTACK PATTERN
THEY'RE GOING TO KILL THOUSANDS OF INNOCENT BEINGS.
NO, THEY'RE NOT.
I'M WITH YOU, BUMBLEBEE—BUT THAT'S A D.V.X.-CLASS HEAVY TRANSPORT.
YEAH, WHAT ARE THE THREE OF US GOING TO DO?
WHATEVER WE HAVE TO. WE'LL HAVE TO PROTECT EVERYONE DOWN THERE, WHOEVER THEY ARE.
RAMMING SPEED, JETFIRE.
WHAT?!
WE'RE DITCHING THE SHUTTLE AND TAKING ON THIS S/D SQUAD.
YOU KNOW THERE'S NO GUARANTEE ANYBODY WILL EVER FIND US OUT HERE.
WE SEND OUT A SIGNAL AND HOPE FOR THE BEST, THEN.
WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

I DO THE ONLY THING I CAN—I MOVE IN FIRST, AND I MOVE IN LOUD.
KA-BOOM
I GIVE THEM A WARNING—GIVE THESE WORTHLESS CREATURES A CHANCE TO FIND SHELTER—TO AVOID MY COMPANIONS' GUNS.
AND I FAIL UTTERLY
NICE MOVE, THUNDERCRACKER—LURING THESE THINGS OUT INTO THE OPEN!
YOU'RE MORE SADISTIC THAN I GAVE YOU CREDIT FOR!
YOU'RE A REAL DECEPTICON AFTER ALL!
LET BLITZWING AND THE OTHERS DO WHAT THEY WILL
IT DOESN'T MATTER
ONLY THE MISSION..

..ONLY THE HUNT
THE CITY IS FALLING, SIR.

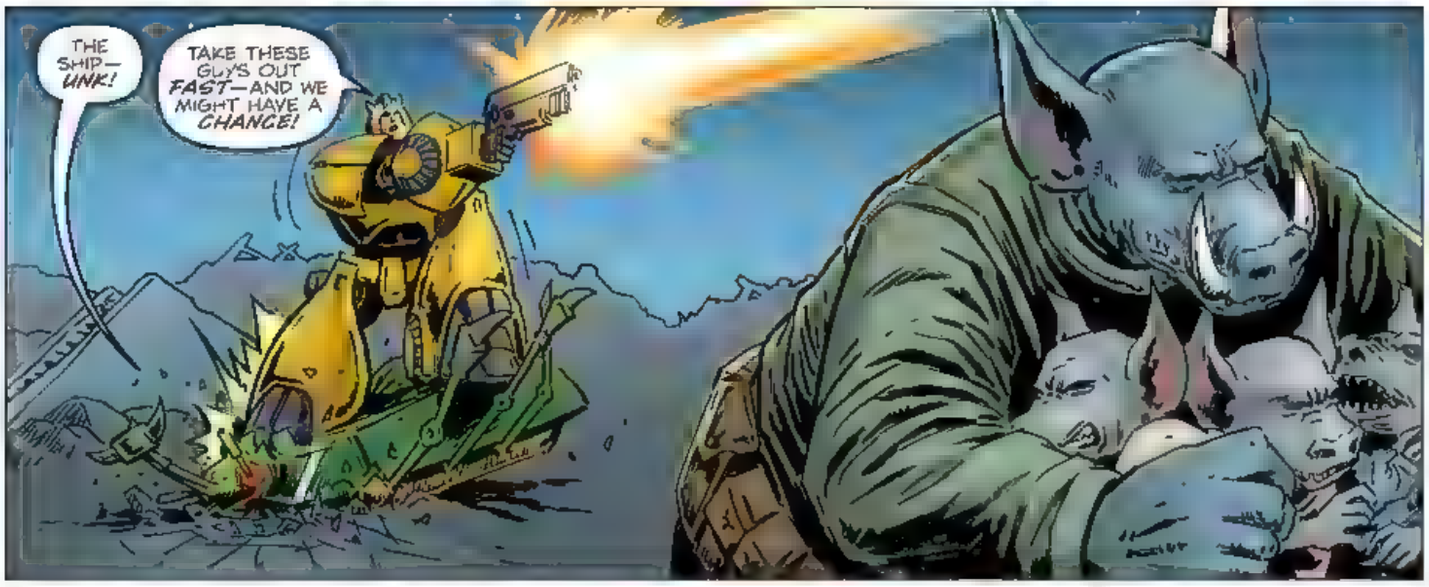
THUNDERCRACKER SEEMS TO BE ON THE GROUND, THOUGH...
WHY IS HE NOT EXTERMINATING THE BIOLOGICAL INFESTATION WITH THE OTHERS?
UNLESS HE'S FOUND A WAY TO THE TITAN ALREADY.


OF COURSE. SUCH A LOYAL SOLDIER.
INITIATE PLANETARY BOMBARDMENT. HELP HIM OUT


AND THE REAL CARNAGE BEGINS.
BLUDGEON PROBABLY THINKS HE'S HELPING.
WHO AM I KIDDING? HE PROBABLY IS, BY ANY REASONABLE DECEPTICON WAY OF THINKING.

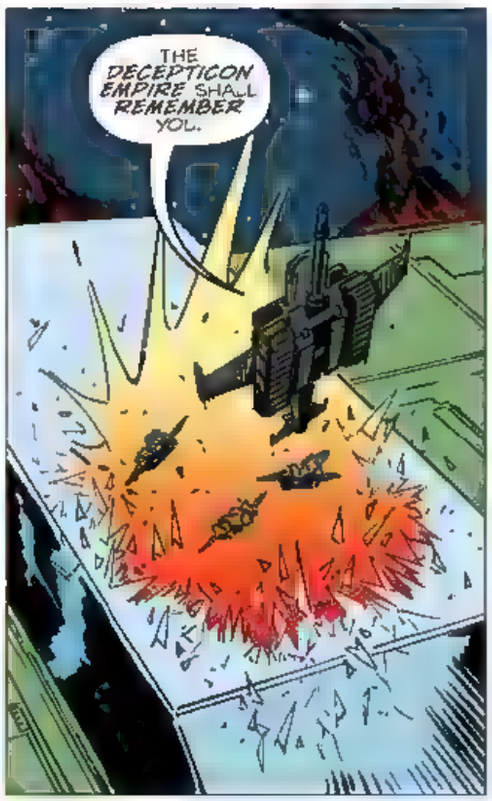
HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE GEOTHERMAL ENERGY. THESE WRETCHED CREATURES MANAGED TO MAKE A RUDIMENTARY ELECTRICAL GENERATOR AND A STEAM TUNNEL..
...LEADING ME RIGHT WHERE I WANT TO GO.
YOU— WASPINATOR!
FOLLOW ME IN— I'LL NEED BACKUP.
PRIMUS KNOWS WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO IF I ACTUALLY FIND METROPLEX. HOPEFULLY HE WON'T NOTICE ME.
..I'LL BE ABLE TO GET THE DATA BEFORE—
WASPINATOR!

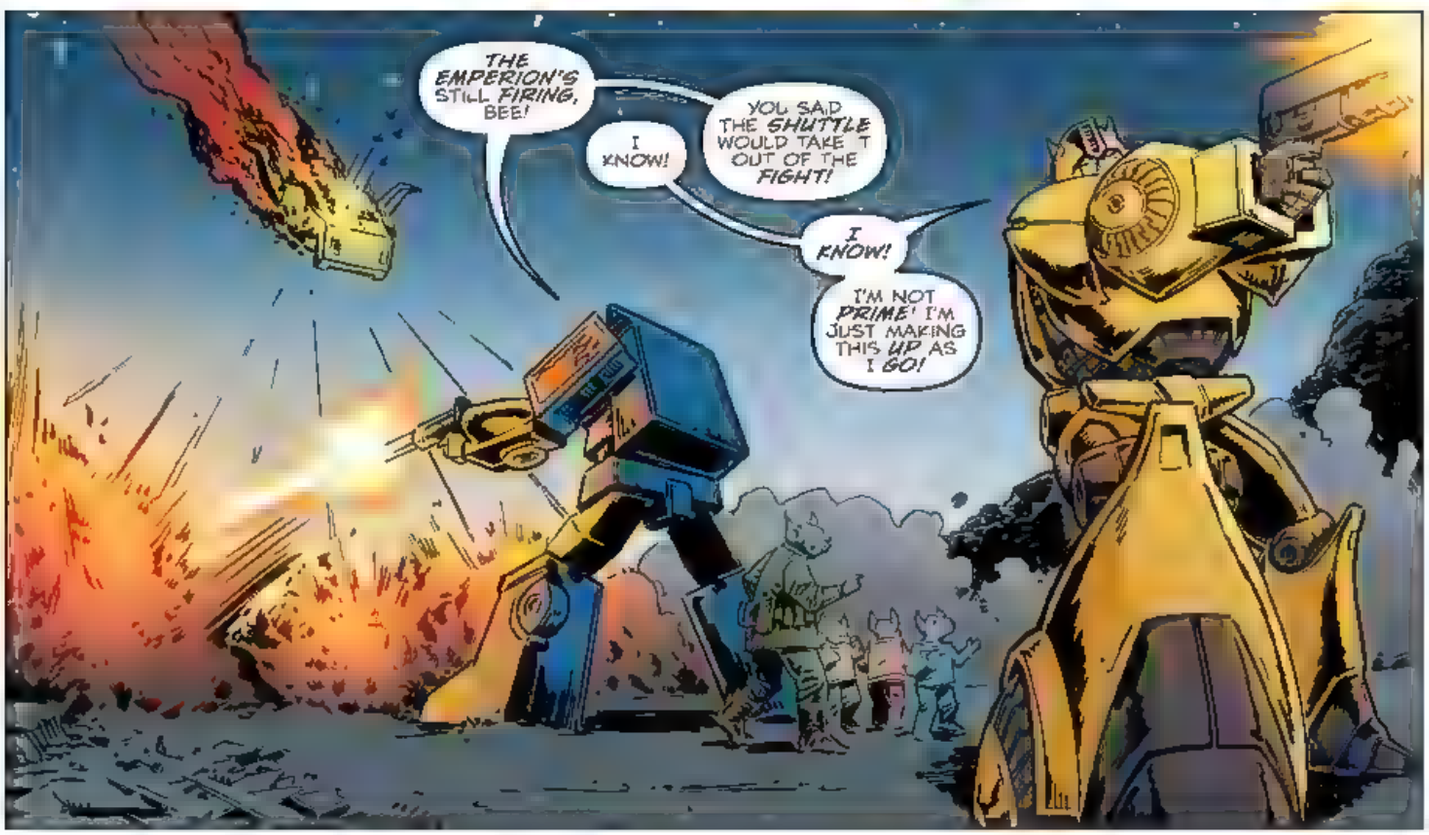
THIS WASN'T ANYTHING I WAS EXPECTING
JETFIRE— COVER THE SKY!
ROGER!
KA-KROOM
NIGHTBEAT— GET THE CREATURES TO SAFETY!
HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO DO THAT?
FIGURE SOMETHING OUT!


THE SHIP— UNK!
TAKE THESE GUYS OUT FAST—AND WE MIGHT HAVE A CHANCE!

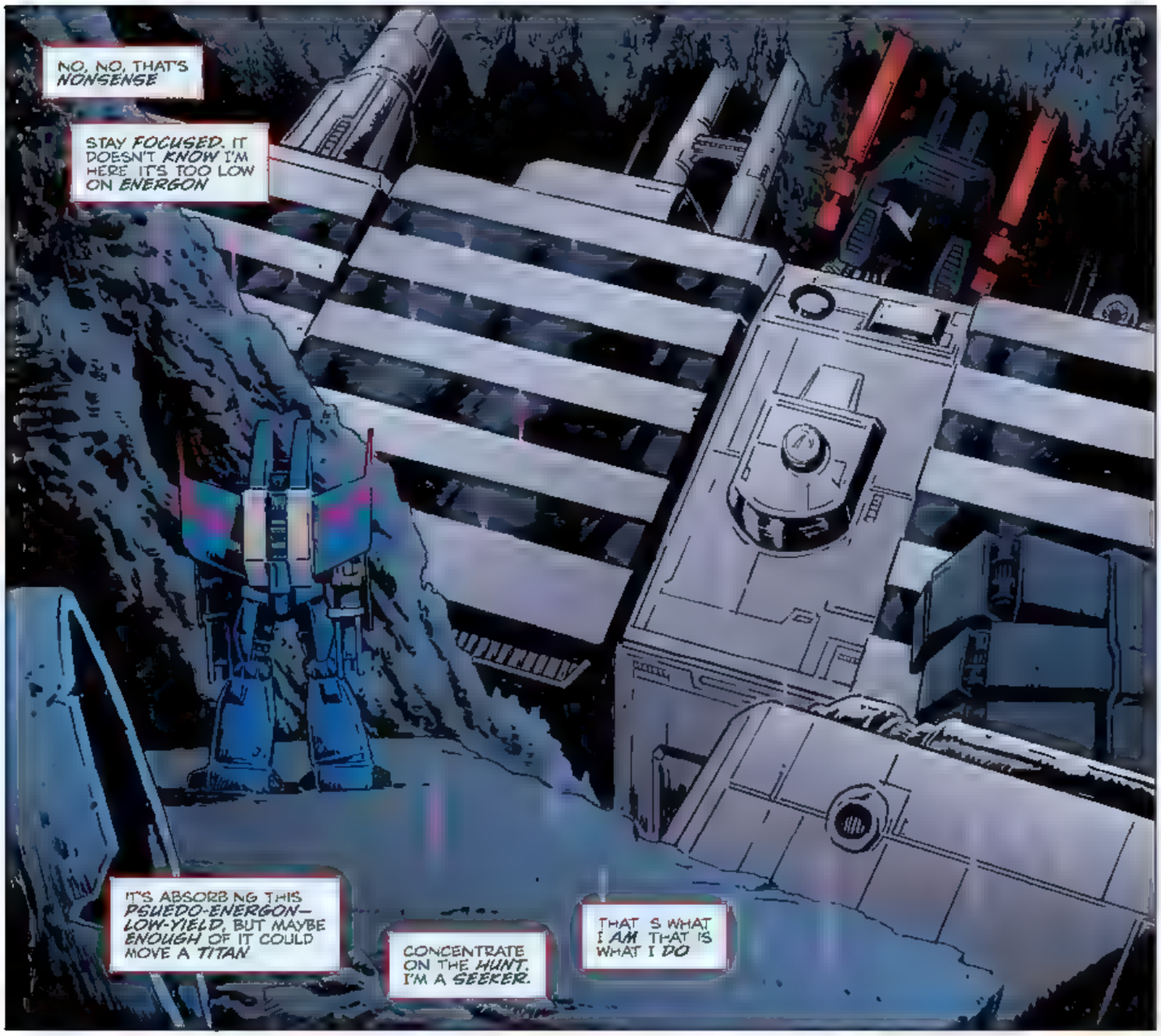
COMMANDER BLUDGEON! THE IMPACT S TEAR NG US APART! WE'RE GOING DOWN!
FLIERS, WITH ME

ALL OTHERS REMAIN AT YOUR POSTS

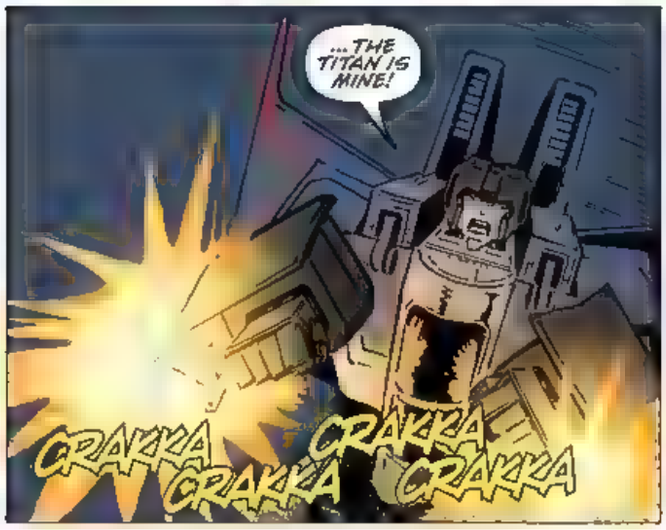

THE DECEPTICON EMPIRE SHALL REMEMBER YOU.


THE EMPERION'S STILL FIRING, BEE!
I KNOW!
YOU SAID THE SHUTTLE WOULD TAKE T OUT OF THE FIGHT!
I KNOW!
I'M NOT PRIME! I'M JUST MAKING THIS UP AS I GO!

NOW YOU TELL ME!
BEE—I THINK ONE OF THEM DUCKED DOWN SOME SORT OF A TUNNEL!
GOT IT—DO WHAT YOU CAN UP HERE
EVERYTHING'S FALLING APART.
OKAY, DECEPTICONS.
LET'S... SEE HOW THIS GOES.
THAT WASN'T A VERY INSPIRING LINE, NIGHTBEAT
IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY
IT STARTED WITH MY LIE I CAUSED THIS.


NO, NO, THAT'S NONSENSE
STAY FOCUSED. IT DOESN'T KNOW I'M HERE. IT'S TOO LOW ON ENERGON
IT'S ABSORBING THIS PSUEDO-ENERGON— LOW-YIELD, BUT MAYBE ENOUGH OF IT COULD MOVE A TITAN
CONCENTRATE ON THE HUNT. I'M A SEEKER.
THAT'S WHAT I AM. THAT IS WHAT I DO

FREEZE, THUNDERCRACKER! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE—
—OH, BOY... METROPLEX—?
NO..


...THE TITAN IS MINE!
CRAKKA
CRAKKA
CRAKKA
CRAKKA

ERG WHY CAN'T ANYTHING BE EASY?

IT CAN BE, AUTOBOT!
JUST GIVE UP! WHY DO YOU EVEN DO TH S?
CRAKKA CRAKKA CRAKKA CRAKKA

BECAUSE SOMEBODY HAS TO!
SOMEBODY HAS TO STAND UP AGAINST 'BOT'S LIKE YOU!
KRAK KRAK

HEH SOMEBODY NEEDS GROUND TO MAKE H S STAND.
FAWOOSH

CRAKKA CRAKKA CRAKKA
URGHH!

YOU'RE JUST ANOTHER CASUALTY IN A UNIVERSE THAT DOESN'T CARE ABOUT YOU IN THE SLIGHTEST.
WHAT—?!
WUMP
LITTLE CREATURE, YOUR SACRIFICE IS AS MEANINGLESS AS THE AUTOBOT'S.
YOU COULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT YOU'D REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE...?
HE REALLY COULDN'T HAVE.
NO...
BUT HE MADE THE SACRIFICE ANYWAY. IF NOT TO SAVE THE LIFE OF ANOTHER CREATURE... AT LEAST TO NOT ALLOW ITS DEATH TO HAPPEN UNIMPEDED.
AND THAT'S WHEN IT MADE SENSE. I DIDN'T LIE TO BLUDGEON FOR THE SAKE OF MY OWN GLORY...
...I LIED BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT HIM OR HIS CREW TO HAVE THIS.
THUNDERCRACKER TO ALL POINTS. METROPLEX IS GONE.
THERE IS NOTHING OF VALUE HERE.

YOU KNOW, IF ALL AUTOBOTS WERE LIKE YOU...
...WELL, NEVER MIND. THAT JUST ISN'T THE CASE.
UNTIL NEXT TIME, AUTOBOT.
THA-BOOM
CRACK-A-KOOSHH
AH...

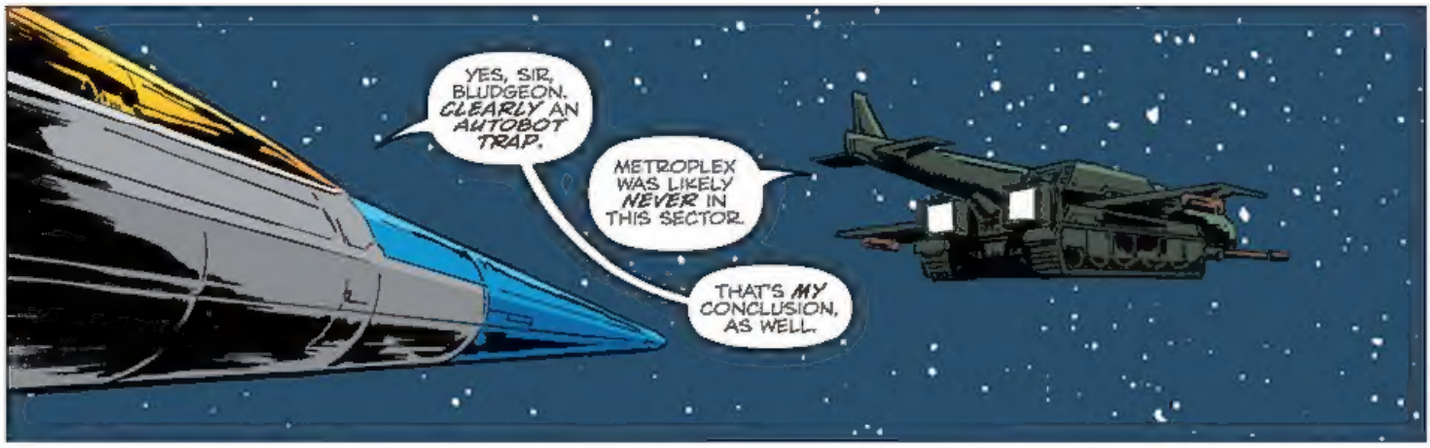
...I MUST GO. I HAVE A MISSION.
GOODBYE.

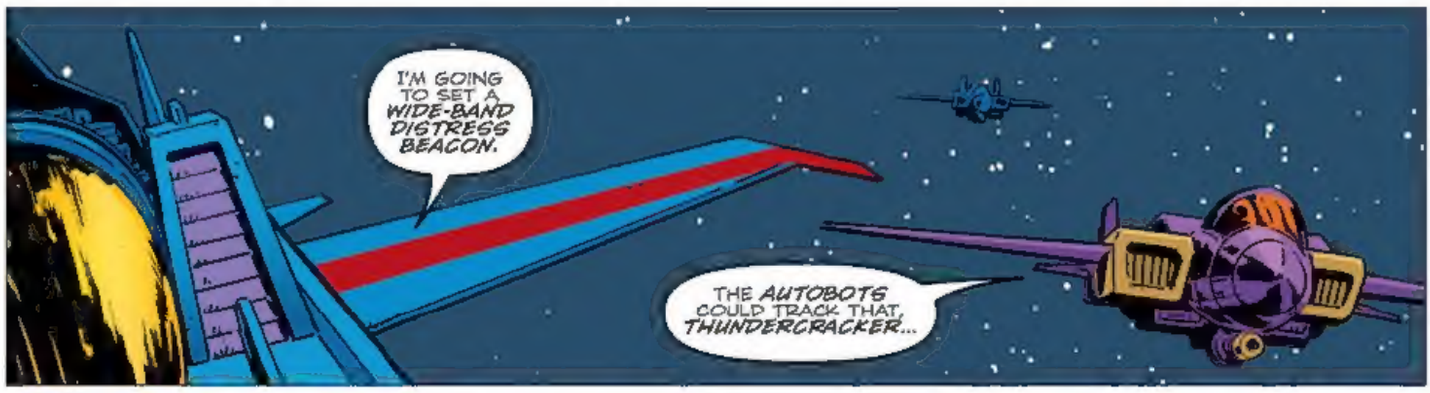
YEAH.
SEE YOU LATER, METROPLEX.

OOF.
EVERYBODY OKAY?
BEEN WORSE. THE DECEPTICONS CLEARED OUT. WHAT HAPPENED DOWN THERE?
YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE ME.
WHO'S THAT? OH, HANG ON.
THIS ISN'T ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE "BUMBLEBEE MAKES A FRIEND" STORIES, IS IT?

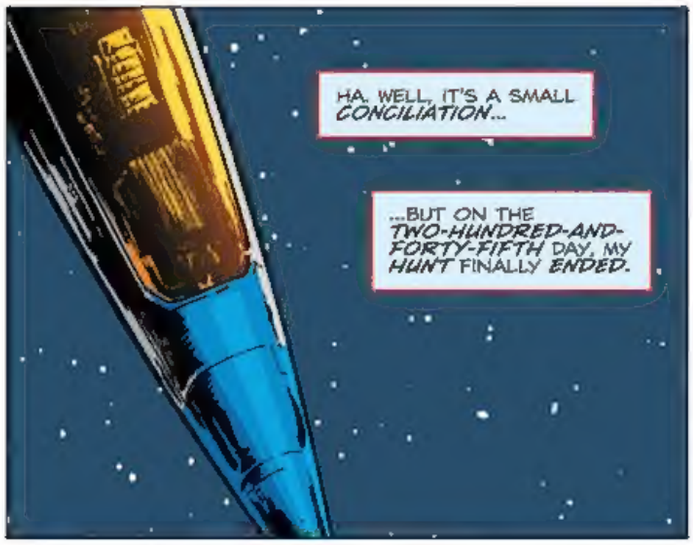
HA HA. YOU BETTER HOPE I MADE A FRIEND.
WE'RE GONNA BE STUCK HERE FOR A WHILE.

I'M GOING TO BE STUCK WITH THIS CREW.
I RESIGN MYSELF TO MY FATE.
QUITE A HUNCH, THUNDERCRACKER.


YES, SIR, BLUDGEON. CLEARLY AN AUTOBOT TRAP.
METROPLEX WAS LIKELY NEVER IN THIS SECTOR.
THAT'S MY CONCLUSION, AS WELL.


I'M GOING TO SET A WIDE-BAND DISTRESS BEACON.
THE AUTOBOTS COULD TRACK THAT, THUNDERCRACKER...

...HOW MANY DECEPTICONS DID WE ALREADY LOSE TODAY, BECAUSE OF YOU?
ENOUGH, BLITZWING.
INITIATE THE DISTRESS BEACON. WE'VE NO TIME TO WASTE. YOU HAVE A BATTLEFRONT TO RETURN TO, THUNDERCRACKER.
THE REST OF US HAVE A HUNT TO CONTINUE.
WITHOUT YOU.


HA. WELL, IT'S A SMALL CONCILIATION...
...BUT ON THE TWO-HUNDRED-AND-FORTY-FIFTH DAY, MY HUNT FINALLY ENDED.

I STILL DON'T EVEN KNOW IF I FOUND WHAT I WAS LOOKING FOR...